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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND DRL/NESCA
NSC FOR KUMAR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: POWER POLITICS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DELTA CITY
OF MANSOURA

REF: A. 08 CAIRO 833
[1](#)B. 08 CAIRO 495
[1](#)C. 08 CAIRO 389
[1](#)D. 05 CAIRO 9100
[1](#)E. 05 CAIRO 8911
[1](#)F. 05 CAIRO 8663

Classified By: Economic-Political Minister-Counselor
Donald A. Blome for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. KEY POINTS

-- (U) On July 15 we visited the Delta city of Mansoura, with a population of 1 million, high unemployment and a formerly agricultural economy transitioning to light manufacturing and other trade.

-- (C) One local businessman and NGO leader told us that in the past six months the GOE has forced the city's wealthy Muslim Brotherhood (MB) merchants out of business so they will not be able to fund MB-affiliated candidates in the 2010 parliamentary elections. He said the GOE will pressure secular merchants to run as ruling NDP candidates.

-- (C) Another NGO leader who has benefitted from USG-funded political training described how the GOE forced him out of political work, and used vote rigging to prevent him from winning a local council seat in 2008.

-- (U) NGO leaders described their work in civic education, legal aid and socio-economic development.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: GOE efforts to force MB candidates out of the 2010 spring and fall parliamentary elections by cutting off their funding sources well in advance would be a new strategy. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, the government used a goal-line defense of arrests and preventing citizens from voting in the second and third rounds following MB success in the first round (refs D, E, F). In the two months preceding the 2008 local elections, the GOE arrested several hundred MB leaders and candidates before the MB boycotted the contests in protest (refs A, B, C). Quiet efforts to cut off MB funding, combined with the recent, publicized arrests of MB leaders throughout the country, could indicate that the GOE is off to an early, multifaceted start to marginalizing the MB in advance of the 2010 elections. End comment.

Mansoura: Economy and Basic Facts

[1](#)3. (SBU) Mansoura, located approximately 100 miles north of Cairo with a population of about 1 million, is the capital of the Daqaliya Governorate, and sits in the midst of the Delta's almost unbroken agricultural land stretching north

from Cairo to the Mediterranean. Mansoura's economy was based on agriculture, particularly rice, but merchants have branched into other areas of commerce due to decreasing prices for fruits and vegetables. A large percentage of the population still works in agriculture, but the city's commerce also focuses on light manufacturing, real estate, construction and import-export trade. Contacts told us that Mansoura's university-educated youth are leaving the city when they can find jobs in Cairo and Alexandria. Contacts noted that unemployment is high, particularly among youth, and that the majority of the population is "poor," but less so than in Upper Egypt. They noted there has been little political tension or violence in the city since the 2005 elections.

GOE Strangling the MB

14. (C) Amer Fares, a local businessman and director of a youth empowerment NGO, told us that the GOE has cracked down on Muslim Brotherhood (MB) businessmen in Mansoura to the extent that the MB can no longer provide social services in the city. He said the GOE began to run prominent legitimate MB merchants out of business six months ago to weaken the organization in advance of the 2010 parliamentary elections. Fares predicted that the MB would be "out of commission" for the elections, and that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) would recruit secular businessmen to run as self-funded NDP candidates. He asserted that the NDP would pressure such merchants to run as NDP candidates by threatening to hinder their business activities with red-tape if they refused.

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According to Fares, the NDP would easily co-opt secular Mansoura merchants who succeeded in winning seats as independents by preventing them from providing constituent services through parliament unless they join the NDP. Fares predicted that the 2010 elections would be quiet in Mansoura due to the GOE forcing the MB off the political stage.

NDP Trying to Win Back the Population

15. (C) Director of the Constitutional Protection Center Mohammed Shalaby told us that the MB is powerful in Daqaliya Governorate, and that MB-affiliated independent MPs hold 4 of the governorate's 17 seats. People in Mansoura "hate" the NDP, Shalaby claimed, due to the poor economy, educational system and health sector. He said that rampant government corruption in the public health sector has increasingly compelled citizens to visit private clinics. The MB is therefore an alternative to the NDP, Shalaby noted, although Mansoura is a relatively secular city due to its universities. Shalaby said that two years ago the NDP appointed a competent governor for Daqaliya, General Samir Salaam, to replace the previous governor who was "terrible" and had no plans for the governorate. Salaam has emphasized development, encouraged NGOs to visit prisons and started a city beautification campaign.

GOE Pushing Civil Society Out of Politics

16. (C) Shalaby said that he used campaign training from the USG-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) as a candidate in the 2008 local council elections. To save money, he relied on SMS messaging and recruiting unpaid volunteers. He also offered free legal services to the poor to generate good will. Shalaby believed he probably would have won a seat if the NDP had not "stolen" the elections through vote rigging. He described how the GOE began to watch his activities closely after he began working with NDI and the Ibn Khaldoun Center (IKC) to monitor the 2005 parliamentary elections.

Shalaby said the GOE was particularly displeased with Shalaby's work with IKC founder Saad Eddin Ibrahim to reform electoral lists in advance of the 2005 elections, and Shalaby's criticism of the 2007 constitutional amendments. Shalaby claimed that harassment by State Security Investigative Services (SSIS) made it impossible for him to continue his political work, and he now focuses on socio-economic development through legal aid.

Civil Society: Legal Aid and Civic Education

17. (C) Shalaby's NGO work focuses on advocating for Mansoura's poor by providing legal aid and writing letters to the GOE demanding the provision of social services for citizens, such as fertility treatment and employment accommodation for the disabled. He is now working with the local council to urge improved city sanitation based on environmental laws. Shalaby said the government had been embezzling public funds allocated for garbage collection. He noted that SSIS has not harassed him since he stopped overtly political activities.

18. (C) Amr Fares, Director of the Fares Foundation for Social Care, told us that he funds his organization from his business profits, and focuses on youth empowerment. He organized an essay contest for 740 university students to write about democracy, and is now producing a drama with local university students as actors on how democracy can improve socio-economic life, using the U.S. as a model. "The U.S. is the most successful country because it is the most democratic nation," he told us. Fares has also run tolerance dialogues between MB and Christian university students, and is planning a website for youth to discuss the same issues that are covered in parliament. Fares said he is targeting youth to teach them about democracy before they become "corrupted" by either the NDP or the MB, which he viewed as "backward and regressive." Fares said that SSIS does not harass him for his activities.

19. (SBU) Director of the Human Development Association Mohammed Mohi works to promote a culture of citizen complaints and documentation. He worked with the Ibn Khaldoun Center on USG-funded election monitoring in 2005, and with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Mohi wants to increase collaboration with the NED to expand his

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organization's complaints hotline. He is working with Freedom House on a grant to investigate torture in three governorates. Mohi said that he coordinated with other NGOs and the media in 2008 to raise awareness of a police torture-murder case that resulted in a court sentencing the officer to 7 years in prison.

10. (U) Manager of the Al-Safwa Center for Legal Protection Nabil Khalil described his work to spread awareness of citizens' rights regarding the police and the electoral system. He said the Mansoura electoral lists are inaccurate and include the deceased. Khalil, a retired Interior Ministry officer, said he wants to use his connections with the MOI and parliament to affect positive change, particularly in relations between the police and the population.
Tueller